

Public Health Fact Sheet

MRSA



What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to antibiotics called beta-lactams. Beta-lactam antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA usually spreads from person to person through hands or close, skin-to-skin contact. Drainage from an infected wound can spread MRSA to other parts of the body or to other persons. We are all at risk for getting a MRSA infection, because MRSA can live on the skin and survive on some surfaces for prolonged periods of time.

What do MRSA infections look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

Should the school be closed to be disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?

In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have been contaminated by someone else's infection. **Covering infections will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA.** When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.

Are MRSA infections treatable?

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. However, many staph skin infections may be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

How can I prevent MRSA skin infections?

Practice good hygiene:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
5. When at the gym, use a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment; and wipe surfaces of equipment before and after use.